

Upper Green Residents to BLM: Jonah Infill Decision Fails to Adequately Protect Air Quality

*Jonah project, with more than 3,000 new wells, fails to set air quality requirements
Previous BLM air quality estimates underestimated by a factor of three*

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Pinedale, Wyo. – Residents from the Upper Green River Valley today said that growing concerns about local air quality had caused them to urge the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to reconsider the agency's decision to allow more than 3,000 additional wells to be drilled in the Jonah Field in the coming years.

In a news conference held at the Sublette County Public Library in Pinedale, the Wyomingites especially are concerned because the BLM has set no timeline for the implementation of better, cleaner drilling practices and that the federal agency previously has underestimated the level of produced nitrogen oxides (NOx) emissions by a factor of three.

As a result, today several conservation groups filed a public appeal of the BLM's decision with the goal that this would establish more definite emission limits and firm requirements for cleaner drilling practices as the local citizens are advocating.

“The well-known, harmful health effects – both physical and mental – of deteriorating air quality are not being recognized as a viable factor, nor are they being effectively dealt with by either industry or governmental agencies,” said J. Thomas Johnston, M.D., a former Sublette County Health Officer and community physician for Pinedale from 1958 to 2001.

The local residents, joined by the Upper Green River Valley Coalition based in Pinedale, said they are not seeking to end development on the Jonah Field, but they are calling for a common sense balance that allows for energy exploration with a defined upper limit on emissions. By law, the BLM is required to control air pollution by working with Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Forest Service to set this red-line level.

Unfortunately, the Jonah project has no certain requirements for Jonah Field operators to use best available technology. Cleaner technology will only be required “at the earliest possible date.” Such technology, such as natural gas-fired drilling rigs, while now being piloted or tested, is not yet widely available and the BLM won't require industry to slow down new drilling until the technology update can happen. Also, if technology fails to achieve BLM's proposed 80 percent reductions in emissions, there are no requirements from BLM to control air pollution by simply *slowing* the pace of development to reasonable levels.

“The consequences of failing to require smarter drilling practices are significant,” said Linda Baker, community coordinator for the Upper Green River Valley Coalition. “Already we are seeing the impact on hundreds of high-altitude lakes in the Wind River Range while we're also starting to lose the long views of the mountains surrounding this valley. We don't seek an end to development of

the Jonah Field, but we are asking for smarter development and a cleaner tomorrow. This is about balance, responsibility and accountability.”

As the Environmental Protection Agency has noted, the Upper Green’s air has historically been some of the finest in the United States. But the rapid, widespread development of drilling and related activities in the valley has had a visible impact on air quality. Emissions of a major component of regional haze—NOx—already are nearly triple the level expected at the nearby Pinedale Anticline gas field with 1,985 tons being released per year rather than the 693 tons projected.

Joining in the news conference today:

--Judi Adler : A Sublette County resident for 28 years; Board Chair for the Hoback Ranches Service & Improvement District; local landowner; and Commissioner for the Sublette County Planning & Zoning Commission

--J. Thomas Johnston, M.D.: Sublette County Health Officer; community physician for Pinedale 1958-2001; local landowner

--Perry Walker: Major, US Air Force (Ret.); physicist; astronomer; local landowner; Chair, Pinedale Anticline Working Group Air Quality Task Group

--Tracey McCarty : Her project “Ground Ozone” was First Place winner at Southwest Wyoming Regional Science Fair; First Place winner & Honorable Mention for Best of Show at Wyoming State Science Fair; National Science Fair nominee, sponsored by The Discovery Channel

--Linda Baker, Community Organizer, Upper Green River Valley Coalition; Chair, Pinedale Anticline Working Group

Note: For more information and background, see www.uppergreen.org